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THE  
**PECULIAR MISSION OF  
A QUAKER SCHOOL**

Douglas H. Heath  
PENDLE HILL PAMPHLET 225

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Much of his professional life has been devoted to research on the process of healthy growth, which has resulted in many publications, the most recent being *Maturity and Competence: A Transcultural View* (1977). He is studying the development of adults and the predictors of their effectiveness, while he continues to work for the Friends Council on Education, the National Association of Independent Schools, public schools, and many colleges. This pamphlet reflects his continuing interest in the meaning of a Friends education, first described in his Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Why a Friends School?*, in 1969. Now, as then, we gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and support of the Friends Council on Education in respect to publication.

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OUR COVER: Pen and ink sketch by Edward Shenton for Helen G. Hole's *Westtown Through the Years* (1942), courtesy of Westtown School, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

## *Foreword*

The Friends Council on Education has generously enabled me to visit many of our Quaker schools and colleges, some a number of times, during the past fifteen years. That the most frequently raised query continues to be, "What should a Friends school be?" tells me two things: one, that most of our schools continue to be favored with head masters and teachers who sense that the mission of a Friends school should be much more than just academic excellence, though we feel uncertain about what that "much more" should be.

Secondly, the query tells me that Friends must continue to search for ways in which to speak more nourishingly to the query than we have heretofore been able to do. Our schools are very vulnerable to the corrosive effects of a pervasively seductive and secular society. Of the procession of new heads, teachers, parents, and students that continuously moves through Friends schools, only a meagre handful come from the Quaker community. My concern is that if our schools are to retain and strengthen their identity as Friends schools and if they are to have transforming effects on the character of their students, then we must reflectively and persistently try to understand what truth our tradition has to speak to the query. And we must as ceaselessly seek to implement our insights in the way we teach and organize our schools.

Those who know many Quaker schools intimately know how far they fall short of our tradition's ideals. Our schools are richly diverse; some have very distinctive views of what "a Friends school should be." Others are much less certain. This

pamphlet is only one Friends's answer to the query. Although it does not describe any Quaker school I know, I hope it puts into words what many may feel should be the values of a Friends school.

I am grateful to Timothy Barclay, Thomas Brown, Eleanor Elkinton, Clayton Farraday, Rachel Letchworth, David Mallery, Adelbert Mason, and Thomas Plaut for their plain-speaking comments and affectionate support while I was preparing this pamphlet.

DOUGLAS H. HEATH

*If Quaker schools are to have a right to existence they must have a peculiar mission.<sup>1</sup>*

**T**HE "PECULIAR MISSION" of a Friends school is to empower its members—faculty, staff, and students—to live more fully in Truth. For Friends, to "empower" is to enable a person to be his or her own minister in seeking that Truth. "To live more fully" is to witness in all one's acts that measure of the Truth one has experienced.

But what do Friends mean by "Truth"—a word 17th century Quakers like George Fox used as the equivalent of God, Holy Spirit, Light of Christ, Inner Light? Friends today, while not in unity about the meaning of such terms, do not become too exercised about formally defining them. Their experience tells them that Truth refers to universal values and principles about the good life and the Kingdom that should be. Such eternal principles are divinely inspired and are both immanent and transcendent to Friends. Quakers believe that such leadings of the Spirit are being continuously revealed. Their religious experience, tested against that of others, not just the authority of the historic church or the Bible, is their way to Truth. The one dogma that unites Friends is that every person, regardless of age, sex, and ethnic background, possesses in some measure the same seed of potential goodness that most fully blossomed in the life of Jesus. Each has the potential to approach the ideal of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Howard H. Brinton, *Quaker Education in Theory and Practice* (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill), 1958, p. 88.

The "peculiar mission" of a Friends school is to educate for goodness, not by requiring its members to live certain truths, but by enabling them to live their lives in ways that reveal Truth to themselves and through themselves to others. A Friends school therefore, should bring each, in the words of George Fox, to the "teacher within."

To non-Friends who believe that the typical Friends school values academic excellence and that its graduates typically become productive and "successful," such a description of its purpose must indeed sound "peculiar," if not old-fashioned. Even words that Friends use, like seed, measure, leading, Truth, unity, and witness, sound quaint, almost archaic. What do such a religious purpose and such words have to do with what really should go on in today's classroom: mastering basic skills and knowledge that contribute to effective adult lives? How does a Friends school get the three R's and its peculiar mission to educate for goodness together?

The conclusion of a comprehensive study of the educational origins of our country's most productive scientists and scholars sets the direction of our search.

By far the most productive of the denominational schools are those sponsored by the Society of Friends. While some of the productivity of these schools may be attributable to their selecting students with high academic aptitude, and while only a minority of the student body are Quakers, these schools are so superior in productivity, not only among the denominational schools but also among all of the schools in the entire sample [which included all of the major universities of the country], that it seems probable that a specific Quaker influence is at work.<sup>2</sup>

What is this "specific Quaker influence" that may contribute to a student's subsequent productivity as an adult? In *Why a Friends School?* I argued that the "uniqueness of the Quaker educational philosophy . . . is found in the way it has been

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth R. Hardy, "Social origins of American scientists and scholars," *Science*, (1974), 185, 497-506.

implemented, not in its basic assumptions."<sup>3</sup> The Friends Meeting for Worship, their communal mode of decision-making, and their way of reaching out to serve others combine to create a distinctive Quaker climate in which to grow. I am now less certain about the accuracy and sufficiency of that stance. I suspect that a distinctive view of education may be embedded in Friends' way of worshipping. If we could consistently apply such a view in our classrooms, we might so unite our religious and academic traditions that the strengths of each would nurture the other. Perhaps if we more deeply understood Meeting for Worship we might clarify what a Friends school should be.

Howard Brinton's observation that, "The divine Light is a principle of growth,"<sup>4</sup> is the bridge that links for Friends the religious and the academic. Early Friends spoke frequently of the Inner Light as a seed, the Royal Seed, of life. Their foremost commitment was to cultivate that Seed. By searching deeply inwardly to live more and more fully in the Light, they sought to fulfill that measure of the Truth which they possessed. In contrast to the gloomy Calvinists of their day, the early Friends believed that they could become perfect, that the Kingdom was potentially realizable in their day. Hope, not fear of damnation, sustained the commitment of the Friends. They also believed that if they perfected that measure of talent that they had, they would discover other talents to perfect. Growth discloses new potentials; growth is its own dynamic impetus to continued growth.

The implications of such assumptions about growth for a Friends school are several. Its climate should be one of high hopeful expectancy in the potential of its members for goodness. Our hopes can create our reality. If we genuinely, and, of course, realistically, believe in the potential of our students,

<sup>3</sup>Douglas H. Heath, *Why a Friends School?* Pendle Hill Pamphlet 164 (1969), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Brinton, p. 50.

more likely than not they will rise to that expectation. But our hopes must be pure, not mixed with the reservations of doubt and despair. The spoken and unspoken expectations of a Friends school must be in unity. The school must not preach loving-kindness and mutual cooperation while its teachers teach in ways that accentuate competitive distrust that divides rather than gathers students and teachers together.

To believe that Truth is continuously being revealed, to expect that one can approach perfection, and to commit one's self to live in Truth is to experience divine discontent. A Friends school should be divinely discontented. I feel uncomfortable when I am with a head and faculty who are contented, who have no innovative experiments in mind, who seem to believe that the Kingdom has already arrived at their school. Should not a Friends school be a restlessly searching, experimenting, risking place, ceaselessly seeking to attain new levels of perfection? It is growing—rather than the stasis of contentment—that brings a sense of aliveness, even happiness. A medical scientist, an alumnus who made the idealism of his Friends school his own, said, "It kept me alive in lots of ways. It's all too easy to lose your idealism because the outside world is such a cynical, ruthless place. My school was a hopeful kind of experience."

The growth, continuing development, or self-realization of a youth, has been the primary goal of educators from the time of the Greek *paideia* until the present. Dewey talks of healthy growth; Whitehead of "self-development;" Raushenbush of making "maturity the more it might become." But just as the Truth or Inner Light has remained an intuitively real but undefinable experience for Friends, so has growth remained an illusive, scarcely precise goal for educators. Many of us misinterpret the Friends' idea of the Inner Light and the educators' goal of growth. Certainly to heed the voice of Truth, "the still small voice within," or to actualize the self does not mean to accentuate and glorify a self-centered indi-

vidualism. For Friends, to live in Truth is to overcome the impetuous claims of self. For countless educators, to grow healthily is to transcend one's sense of uniqueness and so experience one's corporate humanness and identity with all other persons.

It is in their corporate Meeting for Worship that Friends seek to encounter most directly the truth of which Fox spoke, the experience they believe to be the most powerful in furthering growth.

What is this silent unprogrammed Meeting like? From the outside looking into a meeting house, we see a plain room without cross, pulpit, altar, sculpture, stained glass or other decorative features. We hear no music and see no minister. People are sitting silently on plain benches. The silence gradually deepens. Someone rises to share briefly a message, perhaps about a passage of the Bible that illuminates an experience during the week; perhaps about a personal relationship that reveals a more general truth. Perhaps several others rise to speak to the same thought. Or maybe no one speaks. After about an hour, each turns to shake the hands of those around one. They then rise, talking with each other as they depart, apparently reluctantly.

Let us now look at Meeting for Worship from the inside, through the eyes of Alexander Parker who described the spirit of Meeting as he knew it in 1660.

The first that enters into the place of your meeting, be not careless, nor wander up and down either in body or mind, but innocently sit down in some place and turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord, and here thou art strong. Then the next that come in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the Spirit, and so all the rest coming in in the fear of the Lord sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light. A few that are thus gathered by the arm of the Lord into the unity of the Spirit this is a sweet and precious meeting, in which all meet with the Lord. . . . Those who are brought to a pure, still

waiting upon God in the Spirit are come nearer to the Lord than words are . . . though not a word be spoken to the hearing of the outward ear. . . . In such a meeting, where the presence and power of God is felt, there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, It is good to be here, and this is the end of all words and writings, to bring people to the eternal living word.

*Letters, etc., of Early Friends*, ed. A. R. Barclay  
(1841), pp. 365-366

I must speak to those who are skeptical that such a mode of worship has anything whatsoever to do with growing and schooling. We now know that the processes by which productive scientists, mathematicians, artists, writers, architects and others create are remarkably similar to those that early Friends experienced in their Meetings for Worship. "Worship," particularly of the unprogrammed type described by Parker, "brings us to the frontiers of thought."<sup>5</sup> Should not schools nurture those qualities of mind and character that may eventually lead to productive and creative contributions to others? And for those who are disquieted by religious terms, let us recall that such words have long been used, even by scientists, to illumine the mystery of creation, rebirth, and growth. Note, for example, how one researcher summarizes what is known about the inspirational phase of the creative process, that time of "imaginative muddled suspense" of which Whitehead spoke.

It is as if the mind, delivered from preoccupation with particulars, were given into secure possession of its whole substance and activity. This yielding to the oceanic consciousness may be a distracting delight. . . . In its extremes the experience verges upon the religious; but it is rarely so intense or so pure, and when it is, it is not often so enduring a preoccupation as to constitute a real threat to performance. More often it defines itself as no more than a sense of self-surrender to an inward necessity inherent in

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<sup>5</sup>George H. Gorman, *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship* (London: Friends Home Service Committee), 1976, p. 71.

something larger than the ego and taking precedent over established order.<sup>6</sup>

So let us return to examine more carefully Parker's description of Meeting for Worship. Might it contain insights about growth that could help us create a more explicit Quaker philosophy of education for our schools?

*The first that enters into the  
place of your meeting. . . . Then the  
next . . . and all the rest . . . turn  
in to the same light. . . .*

Early Friends shared the expectation that each one who entered Meeting was a seeker, striving to meet with the Lord. To believe and act as if every person in Meeting is seeking to live in Truth is to create a powerful sense of communal identity that may strengthen one's own wavering desire to be open to new growth.

A primary educational principle for a Friends school is *to expect and act on the expectation that every member of the community seeks to live more fully in Truth.* The alumni of Haverford report that the enduring impact of the college on their values is due to its ethical attitude, most clearly witnessed in the weekly meeting for worship. Students discover during their first days of college that the community really expects that they strive for moral as well as academic excellence. The upperclassmen, who have sole responsibility for the orientation of freshmen to the college, make it clear that their honor system is indeed taken seriously and that students must be responsible to other students. The faculty makes plain its corporate stance on critical ethical issues that confront the

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<sup>6</sup>Brewster Ghiselin, *The Creative Process* (New York: The New American Library, 1952), p. 15.

community, most recently, its rejection of any signs of racism within the community. In the classroom, I expect that my students genuinely want to learn and commit their optimal energies in their work with me, one reason students find my courses "demanding," I try to teach in ways that confirm that expectation.

To expect such purity of motivation of human beings is, of course, unrealistic. To share a corporate mystical experience may be only one of several reasons we enter the meeting house. To learn truths may be only one of numerous reasons we go to school. Our motives frequently conflict. We both seek and resist growth. We teachers know the impurity of motivation, the deep resistances of students to growth. We too feel their tugs of distractions, their conflicts of desires, their doubts about the worth of what they do. Friends nevertheless do not dilute their expectations nor abandon their hope in the face of their human frailty; they labor patiently and try to forgive.

*. . . be not careless, nor wander up  
and down either in body or  
mind . . . sit down in pure  
stillness and silence of all  
flesh. . . .*

Seventeenth century Friends knew how distractions, conflicts, and doubts barred the entrance of Truth. The source of creative power is deeply inward, but our path to it is cluttered, if not barricaded, by what early Friends called "deceits:" distractions like religious rituals, the restlessness of a child, even the beauty of the old wood of a meeting house bench that captures our attention. Aches and sorrows of body and mind can imprison our energies and empty us of life; defensive thickets, of which we frequently are unaware, like our inclina-

tion to retreat into intellectual abstractions, may protect us from knowing emotional forces that might shake our existence. To live fully in Truth means to have one's energies free to move effortlessly inward to the center. Early Friends tell us that energy becomes freed for growth, paradoxically, not by careless wandering or impulsive abandonment but by disciplined control that allows us deliberately to let go of our impulses and thoughts.

A second educational principle of a Friends school is *the development of a mature self-discipline that enables each member to enter more deeply into Truth*. How can we assist a youth to so secure possession of his own body and mind that he can abandon, under his control, the claims of both when he wishes? Sensitive teachers know that failing to control one's body and mind interferes not only with individual but corporate learning in the classroom. Researchers are becoming aware of potentials for self-control formerly thought impossible, despite hundreds of years of evidence from yogis. Friends schools might well balance their conventionally competitive team and individual large muscle athletic efforts by sequential courses that emphasize disciplined physical-mental self-control. I think of a kindergarten through twelfth grade program that includes progressive relaxation, yoga, T'ai Chi meditative dance, modern dance, and other disciplined art-music-movement forms that enable a person to learn how consciously to let go of his body and mind when they begin to wander carelessly. Evidence is increasing rapidly that control of disciplined meditative forms produces healthy emotional consequences that in turn could facilitate learning in the classroom.

*. . . innocently sit down . . . turn in  
thy mind to the light, and  
wait upon God singly . . . in  
simplicity of heart. . . .*

When we wait "innocently," "singly," and in "simplicity of heart," without deceits intruding into our silence, we may experience what Fox described so vividly by the words "opening," becoming more "tender," "melting." Different meditative techniques, like repetitively sounding a mantra or counting one's breaths, have been used for centuries to alter one's typical mode of awareness. I do not know which techniques are more likely to increase our access to different levels of consciousness and simultaneously open us to the power of images and symbols ordinarily kept out of awareness or confined to the far borders of daily consciousness. My hunch is that repetitive rituals that require concentration may not have the same opening effect as either just abandoning one's directive control or creating an image, like that of Jesus, and then letting that image have a life of its own. Early Friends frequently brought themselves to the Lord by vividly imagining His presence. For when we abandon awareness of the ceaseless hubbub of the external world and free our attention from our preoccupations, several processes occur which, when not blocked by a concentrated vocal ritual, are similar to those in dreaming out of which so many creative insights spring. The conventional structures of logical thought unravel and fragment; the boundaries of our concepts become looser and more inclusive; abstractions give way to vivid sensory, usually, visual, images that become increasingly fused with

feelings. This regression to more "primitive" forms is typically only partial. It remains under our conscious control. For we simultaneously can steer, redirect, stop the unraveling and recombining process that we are observing from the edges of our inner stage. Persons who are emotionally healthy in contrast to those who are unhealthy can more readily abandon their consciously directed and logical thoughts, experience the decomposing of their ordinary thoughts, *and* reinstitute at their will more conventional modes of thinking and control.

When we become more tender and our crusted forms of conventional thought that tie us to social reality begin to melt, we risk encountering symbols and images whose emotional power can possess us. In one Meeting, I was unexpectedly flooded by hundreds of different but familiar crosses, one after another. I felt as if some remote inner box containing every cross I had ever seen in my travels had just been opened and dumped upside down. The sudden rush of crosses through me possessed me temporarily; I was awed at the miraculous revelation of hundreds of crosses in only seconds. My awe was compounded when my more secular self then asked how was my mind so structured that it could be triggered to reveal so many memories gathered in so many different places over so many years in so few seconds. Really miraculous!

To become so open to the power we associate with the divine is to risk becoming potentially more open to the forces of the demonic as well. Should a Friends school confront its students with such a risk, particularly when some young people are already prone to turn deeply inward, perhaps at the expense of their ties to social reality? We cannot avoid the question. So we must ask, "Why are not more Friends possessed by darkness? What secures Friends during their worship, protecting them from the pull of darkness?" I think of several possible reasons.

The first is characterological. Early Friends associated their carnality, the temptations of the senses, like aesthetic attrac-

tions, and of the flesh, like alcohol, with darkness. Contemporary Quakers are not so severe. Though they are open to experiencing the ecstatic when interpreted as meeting with the Lord, many Friends distrust strong feelings; they are wary about their expression in Meeting. Quakers are more often than not sober, judicious, controlled, patient, rightly ordered. They value understatement. Such qualities provide a massive characterological bulwark against the possible eruption of what some Friends might call the Dionysian forces of darkness.

Fox exhorted Friends to gaze over such darkness to the Light and concentrate on that which was above. When they enter Meeting to sit down "in the fear of the Lord," they expect, in an attitude of awe, to meet with goodness. Such an expectancy may be the key to unlocking the boxes that contain symbols of healing and wholeness, rather than those of illness and division. The power of the self-fulfilling prophecy can be a guardian of one's health when searching inward.

Friends gradually learn from years of waiting in Meeting to expand the circumference of their lives into which the Light may enter. As more of the inner darkness becomes light, as more of the emotional energy of our less conscious symbols becomes accessible to conscious control, the power of the darkness that remains to rise up and overwhelm us becomes less.

Finally, Friends learn from Meeting how to articulate their intuitive experience. We know that the creative process involves not only self-disciplined ability to surrender to the power of the less conscious mind but also requires the ability to return to social reality and articulate its message in some novel but understandable form. Friends learn not just how to turn in their minds to the Light but also how to reach out to others to share the strength they experience.

Henri Nowen says of this process:

The man who can articulate the different movements of his inner

life, who can give names to his contrasting experiences, no longer has to be a victim of himself but is able to slowly and consistently remove the obstacles which prevent the spirit from entering, and create space for Him whose heart is greater than his own, whose eyes see more than his and whose hands can heal more than he can.<sup>7</sup>

Douglas Steere has beautifully described this process in his Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *On Speaking Out of the Silence*. Creative ministry occurs, he says, "if there is a willingness to be led by each of the ones ministering into a deeper level of what they were not only saying but what they were meaning to say, and perhaps even beyond into what something beneath us all was meaning to have said . . ." (p. 11).

A third principle is that a school *educate its members to become more accessible to and in conscious control of their less conscious modes of thought and symbols*. We now know that the brain's left hemisphere mediates primarily verbal and mathematical, analytic, and logically critical modes of thought that so dominate the focus of our classrooms. But we also know that the right hemisphere, more diffusely organized, mediates more synthetic, intuitive, imaginative, aesthetic, practical qualities which are essential for creative playfulness but ones typically neglected in our classrooms. A Friends school should educate more deliberately in each classroom not just for analysis and logic but also for imagination, reflection, and intuition. These skills are indispensable to any inward search.

I recall one Friends elementary school teacher who helped her students learn how to imagine by darkening the classroom, asking each child to close his eyes and to imagine a television screen on which an image, so she reassured them, would appear. Barry Morely of Sandy Springs Friends school teaches his ninth graders how to relax, turn inwards and open their

<sup>7</sup>In Robert J. Beuter, "Religious life as inwardness," *The Christian Century* (Dec. 6, 1972), p. 1246.

minds to the pictures that occur when he produces sounds. They then create poems that center on the image that each has produced.

Although not an English teacher, I believe every teacher should not only teach written and oral communication skills but should also teach them in a way that helps a student reflect about his own style of communicating. I recall Dan's and Ken's papers. Dan's paper created a hovering despair, primarily through the use of powerful disphoric verbs and pensively written sentences. Ken's paper was dull and flat, like the Kansas plain. Dan's paper stirred us. Incredibly, when challenged, no one of the tutorial group, not even Dan, could identify how his paper differed structurally from Ken's in a way that created the effect that it had. They had not learned how to step out of the immediacy of their verbal experience to reflect upon it. Teachers in Friends schools need more direct assistance in learning how to teach skills that empower a student to enrich and deepen his inner life under his own direction and control.

*... turn into the same light, and wait in the Spirit . . . a few that are thus gathered by the arm of the Lord into the unity of the Spirit. . . .*

The perceptiveness of early Friends about the important causes of healthy growth is nowhere more clearly shown than in their understanding of a person's relation to his community. Why did they create a communal form of meditative worship rather than rely on more typical individualistic forms or on the words of special people like ministers in their search for Truth? Friends believe that growth occurs most fully when an

“individual-is-in-community,” a community gathered within the unity of light, not darkness. Why? Recall that though they believe each of us has the potential to know Truth fully, each of us experiences only a small portion of it in our actual lives. Since some insight into Truth may be revealed through any person, even a child, as Jesus has reminded us, Friends seek to remain empathically open and to listen deeply to what others share. Dewey and Piaget have told us that we know reality, that which is true, by sharing and participating in many different views of what that truth may be. Although each person shares the same light, each differs in sensitivity to and discernment of its leadings. So though each has one perspective of Truth, persons differ in their breadth and depth of perception. Friends call those more experienced and of deeper discernment “weighty” and listen carefully to what they share. Such weighty persons, however, are not thought to be final arbiters of truth who utter irrefutable dogmas. They are seekers too who must be specially sensitive to resist the temptations of arrogance and authoritarianism. George Fox exhorted weighty persons, like teachers, “Be careful how ye set your feet among the tender plants that are springing up out of God’s earth, lest ye tread upon them, hurt, bruise, or crush them in God’s vineyard.”<sup>8</sup>

Friends believe that the more our community is able, again, in Fox’s words, “to stand still in that which is pure,” the more each of us is enabled to stand purely in the same light. The healthier our community of relationships is, in other words, the more likely each of us will grow healthily. Such a belief is the basis of Friends’ social testimonies and felt responsibility to devote their energies to creating the society that should be. In such a society, every person will become more empowered to live in Truth.

It is the corporate search for Truth that guards the more

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<sup>8</sup>*Journal*, Bicentenary ed. (London, 1891) I, 391.

vulnerable of us from being overcome by darkness when we turn so deeply inwards, particularly during adolescence. To participate in *corporate* worship not only requires but also encourages empathic listening, self-restraint, patience, and ordered ways of communicating that portion of the Truth we encounter. Such skills anchor us to others; they are our life-lines by which to recover our sanity if we discover ourselves becoming possessed by temporary periods of darkness.

A fourth critical principle for a Friends school is, therefore, *to strengthen each person's desire and skills for participating corporately in the search for Truth.* Teachers are models to students. Teachers who actively search, question, and adventure will inspire students to search, question, and adventure. How does a Friends school nurture corporately the spirit of its teachers? For years the Virginia Beach Friends school faculty has gathered together to worship in silence for a few minutes before each school day. Its priorities are clear to the school's children.

To create a school, a class, that corporately searches for truth means some radical changes in the way we typically teach and learn. How do we create a climate of collective vulnerability and respect? How do we encourage students to become as concerned for the growth of other students and of teachers as for their own growth? What are the skills of caring for others that we should be nurturing if we are to learn together?

For several years, I have so organized the first day of each class of thirty students as to make clear my expectations that each of us should seek to know and value each other as persons, learn how to ask "stupid," though not silly, questions, and begin to develop the skills of cooperatively helping each other learn. The class makes a contract that we "not put each other down," a contract I ruefully discover I am the first to break. By sanctioning "stupid" questions and providing stu-

dents with an opportunity to learn how to ask them publicly, I hope to reduce their fear of learning from each other. And by substituting student-to-student and small group self-teaching experiences for a part of my more dominating presence, I seek to assist students to learn how to listen more carefully to each other, to build collaboratively on what each contributes, and to take other viewpoints into account when arguing, clarifying, persuading. Although still learning how to teach the corporate insight of Friends, I have learned that when a person has the desire and skills to be in unity with others in the classroom, education can become a transforming experience. One very quiet, retiring Bryn Mawr student wrote at the end of the course that studying with and helping each other learn had been the "highpoint" of her entire school career. And I recall how keen and pleased were the students of one spontaneously formed group to discover how well the others had done on a final exam. What powerful classes and schools we might have if each of us really cared for and assumed responsibility for the growth of others as well as felt that everyone else was as concerned for and devoted to our growth. That is the corporate spirit of Meeting for Worship we need to bring back to our classrooms if we wish to empower each other to live more fully in Truth.

*Those who are brought to a pure,  
still waiting upon God in the  
Spirit are come nearer to the  
Lord than words are . . . though  
not a word be spoken to the  
hearing of the outward ear. . . .*

Friends believe that it is the inner word of their experience, not the outer word of authority, that brings them "nearer to the

Lord." For early Friends, to be "brought to a pure, still waiting" did not occur just by reading the Bible, repeating a prayer, or listening to a sermon, though they apparently did all of these in profusion. They read, repeated and listened, not just with their minds, but in openness to the inner spirit. Margaret Fell is reported to have said upon hearing George Fox for the first time, "We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the Scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves."<sup>9</sup> Friends distrusted those, like the Oxford and Cambridge academicians of their day, whose professions of truth lacked the power of convincement of what Friends call "experimental knowledge." To wait in pureness and stillness was to be opened to intuitions and feelings, to surrender "to an inward necessity," an inner force, power, passion. Friends knew when they were in the presence of Truth. They were moved. They quaked. Tears coursed down their checks during Meeting.

The fifth principle that follows from such a view of knowing is that a Friends school *should so educate experientially that the word and life become one*. What does that mean? My hunch is that Fox would call much of what goes on in our country's schools arid theological speculations. He would note that youngsters memorize algebraic definitions but rarely apply them to some real life problem, learn French but rarely speak it outside the classroom, learn to read but seldom voluntarily read the more significant books, such as the Bible, describe our legal system but rarely become immersed in a court trial, memorize that a mile is 5280 feet but rarely pace it off, and even take a course on religious experience, but rarely attend a Meeting for Worship on first day. True, as we mature, our developing imagination enables us to make such ideas more our own without actually testing them in action. But Fox would note many signs, such as lifeless boredom, feelings of

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<sup>9</sup>Fox, *Journal*, II, 512.

impotency, and failures of knowledge to be used outside of the classroom, that indicate that our theology far outruns our experience in our nation's schools. As one professor perceptively told me, "right ideas are not enough. What is lacking in our education is experience. We put right ideas above experience." A Friends school should not.

I teach, I hope, right ideas but I try to ground them in some immediate, direct experience that both provides the opportunity to induce new insights and requires testing what has been learned by means of action. It is by induction that we reflectively learn from experience and in acting that we reveal that we actually know. I am discovering that I have much to learn about how to teach more effectively from experience. My students work with nursery school children when reading about early childhood and with the elderly when discussing the later years of life. They work in innovative classrooms when we explore different educational philosophies. They study a real person to test their mastery of observational and other skills of understanding. I also offer them opportunities to participate in any teaching process of the course that they are willing to carry out responsibly. How will they learn to become their own teachers of truth if they do not experience what a teacher does?

We can also ask, "How will students learn to integrate their knowledge with action, their thought with feeling, if their classrooms are separated from the world about which they are learning?" To weld the classroom more firmly to experience is not a new idea to educators. Many Friends schools have long sought to make education more experiential. The students of Argenta, for example, learned to integrate their mathematical skills with their nascent carpentry skills when they helped to rebuild a classroom-library which burned down. Oakwood School has imaginatively sought to make the word and life one by thoroughly reconstructing its upper school program to include alternative periods of community, hand-skill, and other

types of learnings that provide ways for students to apply their text book knowledge to practical concerns.

Perhaps it is too much to ask that our students be moved and quake. But is it too much to ask of Friends school that it educate its students so as to enable them to integrate action with their knowledge, their feelings with their reason? Growth may be spurred by words; it seldom is stabilized and made one's own only by words. Are words brought to life in Quaker classrooms?

*. . . this is the end of all words and writings, to bring people to the eternal living word. . . .*

To live more fully in Truth is to center down and witness to that which is eternal. Friends have always believed that one should speak plainly and live in "simplicity of heart," that is, strip away the frivolous and unessential to reveal more clearly the eternal, living values. What might such values be?

*Honesty.* A Friend's aye is aye, nay nay. His word is his promise. He does not swear in court that he will tell the truth; he affirms that he does.

*Compassion.* To believe that all persons have the seed of potential goodness is to value their intrinsic worth. Friends seek to create relationships of loving-kindness. They refuse to participate in violence that may bruise or destroy the seed of God in another.

*Integrity.* Friends try to act in harmony with their principles. Some Friends refuse to pay that proportion of their income taxes that go to the Defense Department because to do otherwise violates their testimony to peace.

*Commitment.* Friends value working steadfastly to bring the harmony, equality, and justice to the human community that they believe are necessary for the seed to grow. John

Woolman labored with 18th century American Quakers for decades to repudiate slavery.

*Courage.* Friends try to witness to Truth, regardless of the consequences to their personal lives and fortunes. Friends still go to jail for their convictions, particularly during wartime.

For Friends, such values are the eternal living word. They are universal. I believe that all the major religions identify similar values as the core of the good life. Quite intriguingly, within the past decade, social scientists have begun to abandon their long commitment to a culturally relativistic view of human nature and to the belief that science cannot identify values that facilitate the good life. Some now search for transcultural universals. My own transcultural studies of maturing hint that if we educate for healthy growth we may be enabling students to be more honest and compassionate persons who live with integrity, and who are committed and courageous in witnessing to their commitments.<sup>10</sup>

I do not know if such values are divinely inspired and transcendent. But I believe they may indeed be real, immanent potentials. Why? Because we are learning that as any person grows healthily, that person grows in certain predictable ways. A maturing person becomes more able to represent his experience more accurately. This growth prepares the way for greater honesty. A healthily growing person also becomes less self-centered; he becomes more empathically understanding of other viewpoints. This growth nurtures the potential for compassion. A maturing person also becomes more integrated and so more able to act spontaneously out of wholeness. The potential for integrity becomes enhanced. A maturing person also becomes more stable; he knows who he is, his values are more steadfast, his relations with others are more enduring. He becomes potentially more able to make long-lasting commitments. And finally, a healthily growing person becomes more

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<sup>10</sup>Douglas H. Heath, *Maturity and Competence: A Transcultural View* (New York: Gardner Press [Wiley], 1977).

autonomous. While empathically sensitive to others, he can, when necessary, act independently of their claims upon him. Such a growth nourishes his potential to act with courage when he must stand alone to witness his convictions.

A sixth principle for a Friends school is, therefore, that *it witness to the primacy of the values of honesty, compassion, integrity, commitment, and courage*. Friends say that such values are "caught," not "taught." I wonder if such a belief sometimes gets in the way of thinking deeply about how they can be nourished and witnessed more self-consciously in all activities of a Friends school. How long has it been since the school committee, for example, asked queries like the following:

How do such values affect the criteria used for selecting the head and teachers of a Friends school?

How does the school make clear to its community the primacy of such values?

Do the adults of the school witness such values in the way they administer and teach?

Does the school committee itself witness such values in its relation to the school's head?

Does the school create a time when the entire community reflectively examines just how well it is empowering its members to live more fully in the "eternal living word?"

And when was the last time the school committee asked the most important query of all? To what extent and in what way has our Friends school actually empowered its alumni to live more fully in Truth? We misunderstand the measure of the effectiveness of our schools. It is not the number of Merit scholars, the above-average SAT scores of our seniors, the number of athletic trophies. These are short-term effects. They may not have much to do with the long-term effects of a Friends school that students will carry with them for years. A Friends school should not shy from seeking to discover the truth about its enduring effects. Is the school only doing

excellently what many other non-Friends schools also do similarly—prepare students to do well in college? Or is it actually fulfilling its “peculiar mission” of enabling its students to be seekers, their own teachers of Truth, once they leave the protective shelter of the Friends community?

Friends schools have long been reputed to have special effects on their students that persist far into their adult years. I only wish we knew just what those effects were in detail. The enduring impact of Haverford College has been studied and found to be primarily moral. One alumnus, typical of many that I have interviewed, said, “Haverford College had a tremendous influence informing my ethical opinions. Made me realize the importance of even having an ethical sense, of even having values.” Professional colleagues rated the ethical integrity of the college’s alumni to be the most distinctive of twenty-eight attributes of their vocational adaptation.

*... gathered . . . into the  
unity of the Spirit. . . .*

To yield to the “oceanic consciousness,” to enter into the “unity of the Spirit,” is to experience a wholeness for which every religion has historically provided the archetypal words and symbols. What is a human being but the way he relates to his natural world, including his body, to others and his community, and to his own sense of transcendent tradition and destiny? To live in “the unity of the Spirit,” to experience wholeness, is to live our modes of relatedness in harmony. Each mode of relating involves value choices. Seventeenth century Friends had much to say about how to relate to others and to the transcendent. Perhaps because they were rural folk, farmers, tanners, and blacksmiths, already in harmony with the rhythms of their environment, they had little to say about

their natural environment. But typical of Christians, they denied rather than affirmed, suppressed rather than integrated the desires of the flesh. I remain uncertain just how whole one is who denies the vehicle of his spirit.

A seventh principle for a Friends school is that *it enable its members to make more wise value choices about each of their modes of relatedness*. At its root, as must now be clear, a Friends education is a moral one that is not in opposition to but is integrative with the academic. Friends are united in the primacy of the search for Truth. They accept the methods of science and academic scholarship as potential revealers of truth. Friends schools organize their curriculum in terms of the objects of our relatedness: the sciences that deal with the natural world, the social sciences with interpersonal and communal concerns, and the humanities with our traditions and destinies. Does our academic focus so obscure our mode of relation to such objects that we ignore the moral choices involved in each mode of relatedness? We have not made central to our curriculum topical moral issues, like the social testimonies of Friends against war and racial prejudice, or the survival issues our species now faces, like over-population and limited energy sources. The result is that we have few academically respectable means by which to provoke students to learn how to make wise value choices.

I speak of "wise value choices" rather than of "value choices guided by the Spirit." I believe that many Friends would not want to foreclose examination even of the ultimate bases of moral choice by prescribing that they must be of the Spirit. Recall that the purpose of a Friends school is to empower a person to live more fully in Truth, *not to prescribe that he should so choose*. Isaac Sharpless, President of Haverford College, spoke eloquently to this fundamental Quaker respect for a person to have the freedom to choose his own goals. In his commencement address of 1888, he told the seniors,

I suggest that you preach truth and do righteousness as you have been taught, whereinsoever that teaching may commend itself to your consciences and your judgments. For your consciences and your judgments we have not sought to bind; and see you to it that no other institution, no political party, no social circle, no religious organization, no pet ambitions put such chains on you as would tempt you to sacrifice one iota of the moral freedom of your consciences or the intellectual freedom of your judgments.

For purposes of discussion, let us accept the proposition that healthy growth involves learning how to make more honest, compassionate, consistent, steadfast, and courageous choices. We can then ask queries like the following of a Friends school.

In what specific ways is it confronting its students with the value implications of their different modes of relatedness and helping them to understand how their personal motives and biases unduly influence their choices?

How do teachers of a Friends school enable students to understand empathically value issues from the viewpoint of others who may disagree with their own stance?

In what way does a Friends school assist its students to think through the ultimate bases of their moral positions and to begin to form for themselves a more consistent value stance that provides guidance in their more specific moral choices and acts?

Does a Friends school have adults who themselves are steadfastly committed to Friends values?

Given that Friends are practical idealists who are concerned with what is right action in this world, how does their school help its members test the rightness of their choices in action, even though in doing so, they risk societal opposition and condemnation?

*. . . where the presence and power  
of God is felt . . . this is a  
sweet and precious meeting  
. . . and here thou art strong. . . .*

The effect of meeting with the Lord was, for early Friends, to feel "uplifted," "rising," "being on top of," "up," "over," "beyond." They were joyous. They felt "power," perhaps the most frequently mentioned effect felt by Friends. As instruments of the divine, their human strength became magnified. George Fox's own life is an eloquent testimony to the staying power that comes to those who become ministers to Truth.

We have been searching for clues to that "specific Quaker influence" that unites the religious with the academic in Friends schools. I have spoken more to the religious than to the academic because our schools are clearer about their academic than they are about their religious purposes and the relation between the two. Yet, it may well be in their religious purposes that they find their distinctive strength. Might not that "specific Quaker influence" be found in the "peculiar mission" of the Friends school to empower every member to become his or her own seeker after Truth? The processes of corporate silent worship provide the educational principles necessary to so bring students to their teacher within.

A very wise man spoke similarly when asked to explain the healing influence that witch doctors seemed to have. Dr. Schweitzer said, "The witch doctor succeeds for the same reason all the rest of us succeed. Each patient carries his own doctor inside him. They come to us not knowing that truth. We

are at our best when we give the doctor who resides within each patient a chance to go to work."<sup>11</sup>

What then are the strengths that enable a person to be a seeker of Truth?

A high expectancy that Truth can be known and an insistent desire to seek it.

A disciplined body and mind whose demands can be abandoned or recovered at will.

An accessibility to and ability to articulate the images and movements of one's inner life.

The desire and skills to seek Truth in collaboration with others as well as on one's own.

The desire to test ideas against experience, and the skills of imagination, reflection, and induction in order to wrest ideas out of experience.

The maturity that makes the values of honesty, compassion, integrity, commitment, and courage one's own.

The knowledge that in all that one decides and does one is a moral person whose life is guided by eternal universal immanent values.

These strengths can be nurtured. The peculiar mission of a Friends school is to empower its members, as best it can, with strengths that enable them to seek the Truth.

If, as early Friends might say, my words have been favored by Truth, if they have spoken to the condition of Friends schools today, if they have been written in a way to be truly heard, then I need not now talk further about specific teaching techniques or institutional or curricular changes. It is not a specific technique, but a vision that we make our own throughout life, that enables us to turn to the teacher within and so become our own teacher. Or as the early Friends saw so clearly, it is not the external world but the inner spirit that opens the way.

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<sup>11</sup> Reported by Norman Cousins, *Saturday Review* (Oct. 1, 1977), 16.